

Subterranea Britannica

Chairman's Report 2010



Objectives

Subterranea Britannica's objectives are to promote, for the public benefit, the study of underground structures and spaces of all types and periods, made or used by humans. During 2010 these objectives were successfully achieved through site visits, meetings, and the publication of research both online and through our periodical *Subterranea*.

Governance/Membership

Subterranea Britannica is managed by an annually elected Committee, which met on three occasions during the year; In addition, email is used to progress matters on a daily basis. Informal sub-groups met on specific topics such as the redesign of the society's website. Long standing members of the Committee also comprise the company's Directors; the Directors' Report and Accounts for 2010 accompany this report. The society's activities are supported by an active membership which is open to all.

Membership reached a record 1138 as at 31st December 2010, broken down below. In addition to individual members, exchange memberships were reviewed, with Berliner Unterwelten, Fortress Study Group and the Channel Islands Occupation Society being added.

	As at 31/12/2010	(2009)
Ordinary Members	1,105	1,029
Honorary Members	6	6
Exchange members	21	21
Publications only	6	6

Charitable Status

Following the agreement of members to seek registration as a charity, we had originally planned to wait for the arrival of CIOs (Charitable Incorporated Organisations). However as this legislation has been repeatedly delayed, we instead applied in June 2010 under the current legislation. We have supplied supporting material and after a supportive letter from English Heritage we heard in December that our application had been agreed in principle. Full registration is dependent on a change to our objects which will be considered at an EGM in April.

If the registration goes ahead as planned, charitable status brings a number of benefits. It brings an image of probity to the Society, especially for those who do not already know of our work. There are also potential financial benefits, not least of which is the application of gift aid to qualifying donations and subscriptions. Charitable status also opens up other avenues of funding should we choose to pursue them.

Underground Visits

Two full weekends of site visits for the society were made during the year, arranged by Linda and myself. The first was in May, when 36 members visited Maastricht in the Netherlands. We are grateful to member Joep Orbons for a programme ranging from a Neolithic flint mine to the vault where the Netherlands' art treasures were stored in World War II. In September, 45 members visited a very damp Cornwall. Site visits here, arranged with the help of NAMHO chairman Kevin Baker, included a selection representing the World Heritage Mining Landscape and a smaller number of 20th century military sites, along with a two thousand year old 'fogou' shelter.

The year has also seen a high number of single site visits. Late in the year, two visits to Drakelow attracted a record 170 attendees. Other locations visited include the Coleshill Auxiliary Unit training centre, Crowborough (wartime propaganda broadcasting and Regional Seat of Government), Winchelsea Cellars, the underground Shorts factory at Rochester, The London Transport Museum reserve collection, Neatishead Radar Museum, RAF Upper Heyford

and Dungeness Sound Mirrors. We are grateful to all members who arranged visits – especially to those sites which are not normally open to the public. There have also been a pleasing number of visits arranged amongst members; by necessity these are often for small numbers of people and are thus not always advertised to all members.

Meetings

Successful Meetings for members and the public were held in spring at Imperial College and in autumn at the New University of Bucks at High Wycombe. Tim Robinson arranged two fascinating programmes of talks and presentations, covering sites as diverse as railway tunnels, catacombs, disused underground stations and military sites from World War II and the Cold War.

Subterranea

The editorial team (Nick Catford, Martin Snow, Stewart Wild, Tim Robinson, Linda Bartlett & I) excelled themselves this year. On top of the usual three editions of Subterranea, a special edition on the former Government Wartime Headquarters at Corsham was produced. Thanks and congratulations are due to Steve Fox who wrote this superb publication – the culmination of many years' dedicated research.

Website/Internet

The website continued to show the huge interest in subterranean matters, with over 2,000 unique visitors a day visiting the site. Most activity for the year has been behind the scenes, preparing for the re-launch of the 'refreshed' site, hosted on a new server. This new site features easier navigation, integration of data and a mapping interface. We are grateful to Richard Seabrook for his dedicated work in developing the new look site. This refresh is the first step in a longer term programme to add new web capabilities, for example, the ability for members to upload their own content.

The email list continues to be used for exchange between members of underground information and questions. A survey early in the year determined that the moderation level was about right for the majority of members.

Media

Subterranea Britannica responds to a large number of public requests for information each year, our Secretary (Roger Starling) and Committee being particularly active. The celebration at Royston Cave for our 1,000th member was covered by the local press. Radio Cornwall interviewed your Chairman in September in connection with our visits weekend. It was refreshing to see the extensive media coverage and the successful outcome to the Chilean mining rescue.

Conservation and Protection

We have contributed to the English Heritage National Heritage Protection Plan – in particular on the importance of our underground heritage in periods of history from the Stone Age through to the Cold War. Paul Sowan continues to contribute to the 'Extractive Industry Research Framework'. We have worked with the Bat Conservation Trust and others to increase awareness of the devastating 'White Nose Syndrome' in bats.

Cost Management

Our 2010 membership renewals were substantially managed electronically, saving in both stationery and postage costs. As facilitated by the Companies Act 2006 we will in future communicate member documents (AGM Agendas etc) via our website, unless members opt 'in' for postal communication.

Looking Forward

Continued membership growth and high retention levels are key indicators of a successful and thriving society. The committee are keen that the society continues to develop and reflect current needs and opportunities. The membership questionnaire planned for 2010 has been produced and will be issued electronically in 2011. Achievements for 2010 and forward plans for 2011 are detailed in the attached table.

A. Martin Dixon, Chairman, on behalf of the Committee